

**T H E   P A R K  
A N D  
T H E   P L A N**

C O N T I N U E D

# M I S S I O N   A N D   T H E M E S

The foundation of the general management plan rests on the park mission, a short narrative that reflects the park's purpose and significance. The mission provides a common ground for park management based on the 1996 enabling legislation. It describes the management philosophy for the park and what the park is to be like in the future.

Park purpose and significance statements support the mission statement. The purpose states why the park was established as a unit of the national park system. Park significance defines the park's place within the broader regional and national context. Park themes flow out of these statements and incorporate key concepts that characterize the Boston Harbor Islands national park area. Their function is to communicate the park's purpose and significance to the public.

## PARK MISSION

*The mission of the Boston Harbor Islands, a national park area, is to make the island system an integral part of the life of the surrounding communities and region, and to protect the islands as a resource of national significance, while improving public knowledge and access for education, recreation, and restful solitude within an urban area.*

The purpose of Boston Harbor Islands, a national park area is:

- to preserve and protect a drumlin island system within Boston Harbor, along with associated natural, cultural, and historic resources
- to tell the islands' individual stories and to enhance public understanding and appreciation of the island system as a whole, including the history of American Indian use and involvement
- to provide public access, where appropriate, to the islands and surrounding waters for the education, enjoyment, and scientific and scholarly research of this and future generations

By their configuration, assemblage of natural, geologic, cultural, and historic features, and proximity to a major metropolitan area, the Boston Harbor Islands collectively offer outstanding opportunities for public use and enjoyment. The primary significance of the park's resources resides in:

- islands and peninsulas composed of 1,600 acres of land, archeological resources, historic sites, open space, wildlife habitats, and 35 miles of relatively undeveloped shoreline; all inside an

area of 50 square miles and set against the skyline of Boston and other harbor communities

- the only drumlin field in the United States that intersects a coast, formed by the glaciers some 15,000 years ago
- opportunities for solitude and personal renewal, and land- and water-based education and recreation within an urban area with potential to serve visitors from around the nation.

Contributing to the significance of the park are:

- archeological resources dating from thousands of years of occupation of the islands by American Indians
- three National Historic Landmarks—Boston Light, Fort Warren, and Long Wharf—and other historic sites and landscapes resulting from Euro-American use
- complex natural communities adapted to coastal and island life
- social service facilities and urban infrastructure (water and sewer) that are an integral part of the surrounding communities as well as the history of the region

## PARK THEMES

Park themes communicate the national significance of the Boston Harbor Islands. They express key concepts that characterize the island system. The holistic approach of the themes helps to break down the rigid lines often perceived between past and present, and between people and their environment. The themes are conceptual, rather than a simple listing of important topics or a chronology of events. More specific statements that deal with individual islands or more detailed ideas may be elaborated from the park themes for education, interpretation, and resource management as programs are developed. Examples of sub-themes are presented below to illustrate the concepts.



Islands on the Edge

## ISLANDS ON THE EDGE

Figuratively, the Boston Harbor Islands have often been on the “edge” of society; places used to isolate people, institutions, and activities. Since their ancient formation by rising sea level, the islands have literally been on the edge of the continent, places where land meets sea. Today the islands are at the edge of a major city.

### **Sub-Theme Examples**

- Starting in 1675 the Massachusetts Bay Colony turned Deer Island, and other islands, into internment camps for American Indians during King Philip’s War. This was one of a number of government-sanctioned hostilities toward native peoples in their homeland.
- Captives of several other conflicts have been imprisoned on the islands: Confederate officers were held by the Union during the Civil War; World War II brought Italian POWs, prisoners of the United States.
- The islands have been intensively used to address serious issues of urban life. Island hospitals, quarantine stations, asylums, reform schools, and prisons are among the institutional uses that manifest the reform theory of isolating social and public health problems from the mainstream of everyday life.
- Facilities necessary for urban life, such as garbage dumps and wastewater treatment plants, have been removed from heavily populated areas and located on the islands. Some of those facilities were innovations in their day; today wastewater facilities on the harbor are on the cutting “edge” of technology.
- The drumlin field that intersects the coast in eastern Massachusetts, and results in the drowned drumlins that makes up many of the Boston Harbor Islands, is a coastal geological formation rare in the United States.
- Land and water meet at the Boston Harbor Islands, giving rise to a relatively natural island environment on the edge of a major urban area. The island park is composed of 1,600 acres including open space, wildlife habitats, and 35 miles of shoreline, within view of downtown Boston and other harbor communities.
- The proximity of a major metropolitan area allows children and families from diverse communities, many without resources to travel to other national parks, the opportunity to visit the relatively natural and culturally rich islands.

- The edge between land and sea has changed over time, both through dynamic geological processes and through human action, such as the filling of Boston’s waterfront.



Home in the Harbor

## HOME IN THE HARBOR

The islands and the surrounding estuary have been home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life for millennia. People have lived on and around the Boston Harbor Islands for thousands of years and have made a mark on the landscape.

### **Sub-Theme Examples**

- American Indians used the Boston Harbor Islands for at least 8,000 years, living according to traditional ways.
- The Boston Basin and its drainage system, with its abundance of life, is the reason people settled here. The protection of the estuary and the land surrounding it from pollution is a major challenge of the developed urban areas of the region.
- Europeans settled on the islands in the 1600s, beginning a long line of island residents that have included farmers, fishermen, lightkeepers, military families, and others who depended on the islands for their livelihoods.
- Surrounding harbor communities and their residents have had intimate interactions with the Boston Harbor Islands and their residents, and the islands remain an integral part of life on the harbor, including their role as departure points for visitors to the islands.
- Diverse cultural and historic resources attest to the long history of use, from prehistoric archeological sites to historic structures that housed island residents.
- Terrestrial, intertidal, and marine life abound on and around the islands. Breeding populations rely on island-related habitats, and migrating populations find hospitable shelter here. After thousands of years of human habitation, much of the plant and animal life is not native to the islands.

## PORTAL TO NEW ENGLAND

Marking the maritime entry to New England, the Boston Harbor Islands have played an important role in European exploration, and subsequent navigation, commerce, and coastal defense.

### ***Sub-Theme Examples.***

- European newcomers exploring this part of North America found Boston Harbor a hospitable haven and an important portal to the wealth of the “new world.”
- Maritime commerce through Boston Harbor was the lifeblood of early New England, and now, some 300 years later, it continues to be a vital economic activity for the region.
- The challenge of navigating through the islands led to the construction of numerous navigational aids, including the country’s first lighthouse.
- The islands have a long history as the location of strategic coastal defenses and are dotted with the remains of fortifications. The islands were seen as perfect locations from which to protect citizens from foreign attack and to allow the peaceful pursuit of business and pleasure.



Portal to New England

## RENEWAL AND RECONNECTION

Boston Harbor and its islands provided a rich and sustaining environment for human life until people’s everyday connection to the harbor was severed by intensive urban and industrial use and by pollution. Now, with the cleanup of Boston Harbor, natural ecosystems have the opportunity to renew themselves, and people are rediscovering the harbor as a setting for personal renewal and solitude.

### ***Sub-Theme Examples***

- Now that improvements to the region’s wastewater treatment have been implemented through the 10-year Boston Harbor Project, the quality of Boston Harbor waters and the

surrounding natural environment should continue to improve, given that significant pollution sources are being addressed with additional programs.

- One response to the cleaner harbor is reconnection by residents of metropolitan Boston to the waterfront and the islands, aided by a wide variety of organizations and individuals. As part of that reconnection, the Boston Harbor Islands have been added to the national park system under a unique cooperative management system.
- Park managers and visitors have the opportunity to participate in the renewal of the natural environment of the islands through careful stewardship, “green” infrastructure development, and scientifically based natural resource restoration programs.
- American Indians have been working to maintain and regain their cultural heritage, and the Boston Harbor Islands play a key role in this process. The islands, and their management, provide opportunities for increased awareness between Native and non-Native communities.
- During the 1800s and early 1900s the Boston Harbor Islands were places for people to seek relaxation and personal renewal through solitude, experiences in nature, and recreational and cultural activity; today these opportunities are once again increasing.



Renewal and Reconnection